

WITNESSING BETTER THAN KNOWING THE FUTURE

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying,
Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”*

And he said unto them,

It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you:

and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem,

and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Acts 1:6-8

THESE are among the last words of our Lord. We greatly prize the last words of good men. Let us set high store by these later words of our ascending Lord. It is very curious to my mind that Jesus should make mention of John the Baptist and of John's baptism in these last words. Read the fifth verse, “John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” It is very usual for good men's memories, in their last hours, to go back to their first hours. I trust that some of us will think of our baptism even when we are dying.

*High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
That vow renew'd shall daily hear;
Till in life's latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear.”*

Our Lord began in such a way that He could afford to look back on His beginning. Some do not commence so—their beginning is so undecided, so imperfect, so hesitating, that they may well wish to have it forgotten. But our Lord, at the close of His sojourn on earth, thinks of John the Baptist and pays him a dying word of respect just before He is taken up into glory. I like to notice that interesting fact.

But now, to come more to the text, a question was put to our Lord. Many questions were asked of Him by His disciples, some of them not very wise ones. We are very glad that they asked them, for they have extracted from the Savior a great amount of instruction, and although this question about restoring the kingdom to Israel may have been a mistaken one, and they may have meant a more material and carnal kingdom than our Savior intended to establish (of that I am not sure), yet the question brought to us a reply which we may well store up in our memories and hearts, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

We have three things to talk about tonight. First, *some things which are not for us*. Secondly, *some things for us to receive*. And thirdly, *something for us to be*.

I. First, then, let us consider SOME THINGS WHICH ARE NOT FOR US.

It is not for us to know the times and the seasons, or to be able to make a map of the future. There are some great events of the future very clearly revealed. The prophecy is not at all indistinct about the facts that will occur, but as to when they will occur, we have no data. Some think that they have, but our

Lord here seems to say that we do not know the times and the seasons, and that it is not for us to know them.

I pass no censure upon brethren who think that, by elaborate calculations, they find out what is to be in the future. I say that I pass no censure, but time has passed censure of the strongest kind upon all their predecessors. I forget how many miles of books interpreting prophecy there are in the British Museum, but I believe it amounts to miles, all of which have been disproved by the lapse of time.

Some of the writers were wonderfully definite—they knew within half-an-hour when the Lord would come. Some of them were very distinct about all the events—they had mapped them all within a few years. The men who wrote the books, happily for themselves, had mostly died before the appointed time came. It is always wise to pitch on a long period of prophecy, that you may be out of the way if the thing does not come off—and they mostly did so. There were very few of them who lived to suffer the disappointment which would certainly have come to them through having fixed the wrong date.

I let time censure their mistake. God forgave it, for they did it with a desire for His glory. The bulk of them were most sincere students of the Word, and herein are a lesson to us, even though they were mistaken in their calculations. But beloved, it is not for you to know the times and the seasons.

First, *it is not proper for you*. It is not your work. You are not sent into the world to be prophets—you are sent into the world to be witnesses. You do not come here to be prognosticators of the events of tomorrow about yourself, or about your children, or about your friends, or about the nations of the earth. A veil hangs between you and the future. Your prayer is to be, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

You are told to look for the coming of your Lord and to stand in perpetual expectation of His return, but to know the time when He will come is no part of your office. You are servants who are to look for your Lord, who may come at cock-crowing, or at midday, or at midnight. Keep you always on the tiptoe of expectation. It would be wrong for you to profess that you need not watch until such-and-such a time, for He would not come until such a date arrived.

As it is not proper for you, so it *is not profitable for you*. What would you be the better if you could make a map of all that is yet to be? Suppose it were revealed to you tonight, by an angel—in what respect would it alter your conduct for tomorrow? In what way would it help you to perform the duties which your Master has enjoined upon you?

I believe that it would be a very dangerous gift—you would be tempted to set yourself up as an interpreter of the future. If men believed in you, you would become eminent and notable, and you would be looked upon with awe. The temptation would be to become a prophet on your own account, to head a new sect, to lead a new company of men to believe in yourself. I say that that would be the temptation.

For my part, I would rather not know any more than my Lord pleases to reveal to me—and if He did reveal all the future to me, I would feel like the prophets who spoke of “the burden of the LORD.” Neither would it ensure your salvation to be able to foretell the future, for Balaam was a great prophet, but he was a great sinner—he was an arch-rebel although he was an arch-divine.

Nor do I know that by foretelling the future you would convince your fellow men, for Noah told them that the world would be destroyed by the flood. He could give them a very accurate account of the time when the rain would descend and yet they were not converted by his preaching, neither did they come into the ark. Those truths which God has revealed you must accept for yourselves and proclaim to others—they are profitable for all purposes and sufficient for your work—but the future is known only to God.

And as it is not proper or profitable, so *it is not possible for you* to know the times and the seasons. You may study as you will and pray as you please, but the times and the seasons are not committed to you. Our Lord, as man, spoke of one great event of which He did not know the time, “Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” He does not say that now that He has risen from the dead, but He seems to hint that He did not know so as

to tell His disciples. He must keep secret, even from them, that “which the Father hath put in his own power.”

Notice, next, dear friends, that it is *not good for you* to know the times and the seasons. That is what the Savior means when He says, “It is not for you to know.” For, first, it would distract your attention from the great things of which you have to think. It is enough for your mind to dwell upon the cross and the coming glory of your Lord. Keep these two things distinctly before you and you need not puzzle your brains about the future.

If you knew that something important was going to happen very speedily, you might be full of consternation and do your work in a great hurry. You might be worked up into a frenzy that would spoil all your service. Or if there was a long time to elapse before the great event, you might feel the indifference of distance.

If our Lord were not to come for another hundred years, and He may not, we cannot tell—then we might say, “My Lord delayeth his coming,” and so we might begin to sleep, or to play the wanton. It is for our good to always stand in this condition—knowing that He is coming, knowing that He will reign, knowing that certain great events will certainly transpire, but not knowing the exact times and seasons when those events are to be expected.

But there is something *better* than knowing the times or the seasons—it is *good for us to know that they are in the Father’s power*, “which the Father has put in his own power.” The events will come to pass, then, in due time. The future is all in God’s hands. No prophecy will lack its mate. No Word of God will fall unfulfilled to the ground.

Possess your souls in patience—the things that are foretold are sure to happen. “Though the vision tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” I am persuaded that God never is before His time, but He never is too late. He never failed to keep tryst with His people to the tick of the clock. The future is in the Father’s power.

And especially let it be remembered that it is in His power as our Father. He must arrange it rightly. He must arrange it in infinite love to us. It cannot be that, in some dark hour yet to come, He will forget us. He is our Father—will He forget His children? If the times could be in my hand, how earnestly would I pray that Christ would take them into His hand, or that the Father would take away from me the dangerous power and wield it all Himself! Did we not sing just now,

*“All my times are in Thy hand,
All events at Thy command”?*

The time of birth, the time of the new birth, the time of a sore trial, the time of the death of your beloved one, the time of your sickness, and how long it shall last—all these times must come, and last, and end as shall please your Father. It is for you to know that your Father is at the helm of the ship and therefore it cannot be wrecked. It may rock and reel to and fro, but since He rules the waves, the vessel will not have one more tossing than His infinite love permits. Let us, then, not seek to unroll the map of the future, but calmly say,

*“My God, I would not long to see
My fate with curious eyes,
What gloomy lines are writ for me,
Or what bright scenes arise,”*

but just leave it all with God. The Father has it in His hands and there we wish it to be.

So much concerning some things which are not for us.

II. And now, secondly, there are SOME THINGS FOR US TO RECEIVE.

The Savior said to the eleven that they were to wait at Jerusalem till they had received power by the Holy Ghost coming upon them. This is what we want—we want the Holy Ghost. We often speak about this, but in truth, it is unspeakable—the power of the Holy Ghost—mysterious, divine. When it comes

upon a man, he is bathed in the very essence of the deity. The atmosphere about him becomes the life and power of God. There is an old proverb that knowledge is power—Christ has taken away the knowledge that is not power. He said, “It is not for you, child; it is not for you.” But He gives you the knowledge that is power, or rather, that power which is better than all knowledge, the power of the Holy Spirit.

Gotthold, in his parables, speaks of his little child who wanted to come into his room, but he was doing something there which he did not wish the child to see, and so he went on with his work, when, to his horror and surprise, he found that his child had in some way climbed up outside the window and was standing on the sill trying to look in to see what his father was doing—hazarding his life in the attempt. You may guess that it was not long before that child was taken down with a pat and something more, to teach him not to pry into his father’s secrets.

It is so with some of us—we need just a little pat and perhaps more than that, to keep us from looking into things that do not belong to us. We may be comforted even if we do not know the times and the seasons, for we may get something vastly better, namely, the Holy Spirit to give us real power for our life-work.

The Holy Spirit gives to His people power which may be looked at from different points. He gave to some of them, in the olden times, *miraculous power*, and they went forth, having received the Spirit of God, to do great signs and wonders in the name of Christ. If you have not that, you may hope to have *mental power*. The Holy Spirit does not educate us, or give us culture after the common method of men, and yet there is an inner education and a higher culture which is much more to be desired, which comes from Him.

He leads us into all truth. He makes us feel the force of truth. He gives us a grip of truth. He writes truth upon the heart. He applies it to the understanding. Many a man has become quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord, who was very slow of understanding in other respects. The Holy Spirit takes the fool and makes him know the wonders of redeeming love. It is amazing how persons of very scanty gifts and very small attainments, have, nevertheless, become wise toward God—their mental faculties being quickened with regard to heavenly things in a very remarkable manner.

The power of the Spirit is also, in part, *moral power*. He gives to men qualities that make them strong and influential over their fellow men. He imparts dauntless courage, calm confidence, intense affection, burning zeal, deep patience, much-enduring perseverance. Many other hallowed influences besides these are graces of the Spirit of God which form in men a moral power exceedingly useful and exceedingly forcible. I have known men who have been slow of speech and who have exhibited very few gifts, who have, nevertheless, been very strong men in our assemblies, true pillars of the church, for piety is power and grace is power.

Besides that, there is a more secret, subtle power still, *spiritual power*, wherein, in the spiritual world, a man is made a prince with God, and has power with God, and learning how to prevail with God for men, he catches the art of prevailing with men for God. He is first a wrestler alone by Jabbok. Then he becomes a wrestler in the midst of the host of sinners, conquering them for Christ, taking them captive in the name of the Most High. Power in prayer is the highest form of power, and communion with God is power, and holiness, above all things, is a great power among the sons of men.

This spiritual power makes a man influential, in a sense very different from that in which the world uses the word, “influential”—a disgraceful use of the word. We need men who have influence in the most divine sense—men who, somehow or other, cast a spell over their fellow men. In their presence, men cannot do what they are accustomed to do elsewhere. When these men are in any company, they check sin without a word, they incite to righteousness almost without a sentence. They carry everything before them, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord who dwells in them.

Have I not seen some, decrepit and bedridden, yet ruling a house and influencing a parish? Have I not seen some tottering old woman who, nevertheless, has been a very queen in the circle in which she moved? Have I not seen some poor, humble rustic from the plow who, nevertheless, has worn a coronet

in the midst of his fellow men by the holiness of his life and the spiritual power that God the Holy Ghost had imparted to him?

Now, beloved, I have not time to fully describe this endowment. I have only mentioned one or two points in which it is seen, but this endowment is what we need before we can do anything for Christ. Do you always think enough of this? The teacher prepares her lesson, but does she also prepare herself by seeking the power of the Holy Spirit? The minister studies his text, but does he ask for a baptism of the Holy Ghost? I am afraid that this spiritual qualification, the most essential of all, is frequently overlooked. Then, the Lord have mercy upon us!

The soldier had better go to battle without sword or rifle—the artilleryman had better wheel up his gun without powder or shot, than that we should attempt to win a soul until first of all the Holy Spirit has given us power. Power must go with the Word that is preached or taught if any large result is to follow and that power must first be in the man who speaks that Word.

For this power the disciples were to wait. The world was dying, hell was raging, yet they must tarry at Jerusalem till they had that power. Impetuous Peter must hold His tongue, and loving John must be quiet and must commune in secret with his Master. None of them must go out into the street or stand in the temple to proclaim the words of this life. They must stop till God should see fit to pour out his Spirit upon them.

And I would to God that sometimes we could be quiet, too. It were better to be dumb than to speak only in the power of our own spirit. It were better to lay the finger on the lip than to begin to talk before our message has been burnt into us by the Holy Ghost. Wait for the live coal from off the altar to blister your lip, for then only can you speak with power when you yourself have felt the fire of the Spirit.

III. Now we pass on to the third point, which is a very important practical one, SOMETHING FOR US TO BE.

If you are a disciple of Christ, you are not to look into the times and the seasons which the Father has put in His own power. You are to receive the Spirit of God and then there is something for you to be. Did you expect me to say that then there *is something for you to do*? Well, there is a great deal for you to do, but the text says, “Ye shall be witnesses,” not “Ye shall act as witnesses” only, but “Ye *shall be* witnesses.”

Every true Christian should, in his own proper person, be a witness for his Lord. “Here I stand” says he, “myself a proof of what my Lord can do. I, His servant, saved by Him, and renewed by Him, washed in His blood, it is I who, while I live, whether I speak or not, am a monument of His love, a trophy of His grace.” “Ye shall be witnesses unto me.”

Dear friends, we are to be *witnesses of what Christ has done*. If we have seen Christ. If we believe in Christ, let us tell it honestly. These apostles had a great deal to tell. They had been with Christ in private. They had seen His miracles. They had heard His choicest and more secret words. They had to go and bear witness to it all.

And you, who have been let into the secrets of Christ, you who have communed with Him more closely than others, you have much to tell. Tell it all, for whatever He has said to you in the closet, you are to proclaim upon the housetop. You are to witness what you have seen, and tasted, and handled concerning your Lord.

You are to *witness to what He has revealed*, to make known to others the doctrine that He preached or taught by His apostles. Mind that you do not tell any other. You are not sent to be “an original thinker,” to make up a Gospel as you go along—you are a witness, that is all, a retailer of Christ’s truth, and you miss the end of your life unless you perpetually witness, and witness, and witness to what you know of Him, and to what you have learned from Him. Let this be your prayer and your resolve,

*“Give me Thy strength, O God of power!
Then let winds blow, or thunders roar,
Thy faithful witness will I be—*

'Tis fixed—I can do all through Thee."

You are to *witness to what you have experienced concerning Christ*. Now, what is that? I will just run over this witness, feeling that there are many hundreds of dear friends here tonight who could bear the same testimony and who will do so as they have opportunity.

First, I beg to say to all present here tonight that the Lord Jesus Christ can remove despair and every form of spiritual distress. He did so for me. I was full of darkness, the shadow of death was upon me, and I found no comfort till I heard that blessed text, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." I looked unto Him and was lightened and my face was not ashamed—and I am here tonight to bear witness that a load was thus taken from me, which I could not get rid of in any other way—and my midnight was, in a single moment, turned into the blaze of midday.

Neither have I ever gone back to that darkness, nor have I again had reason to cry, "Woe is me that ever I was born." No, there is, in the name of Jesus a balm for every mental wound, a relief for all the agony of a tortured spirit. I am sure of it. I am not saying to you what I have merely heard from other people, but what I have myself felt, and there are many here who can endorse my testimony that there is no relief to a sinner's aching heart like that which Jesus brings. I wish that you would all prove this truth for yourselves, but at any rate, we are witnesses that it is so.

And next, our Lord Jesus is a great transformer of character. I do not like to speak of myself, but I will speak of many a man whom I know. He came into this Tabernacle a drunk, a swearer, a lover of unholy pleasures, and while the Word was preached, the Lord broke him down and melted his heart. Now he hates what once he loved, and as to those pursuits which were once distasteful to him, so that he cursed and swore at the very mention of them, or at least poured ridicule upon others who loved them, he now loves them himself, and it is a wonder to himself to find himself where he now is. He never dreamt of being what he is. Ask his wife whether there is a change in him. Ask his little children whether there is a change in him. Ask his workmates. Ask his employer—ask anybody, and they will all say, "He is not the same man."

The Lord Jesus Christ has turned everything upside down with him. It was the wrong way up before and so He has put it all right. He can turn the lion into a lamb, the raven into a dove, and He has done so to many of our friends who are sitting in this house tonight, as they would willingly bear witness. Oh, if there are any here tonight, who would learn the way of righteousness and quit the paths of sin, let them believe my testimony which comes not out of feigned lips! "I speak the truth in Christ and lie not." The Lord is able to transform character in a very wonderful way. He has done it for many of us, and if you believe in Him, He will do it for you, also.

Next, we should like to bear witness to the sustaining power of Christ under temptation. After being saved, we have been tempted and we are men of like passions with others. I speak for my sisters as well as for my brothers here. We have all been tempted and we have been well nigh thrown back to our old condition—but when we have fled to Christ and trusted in Him, our feet have stood firm, even upon the brink of the precipice. We have passed through fire and water by way of trial and temptation and yet we stand, for Christ is able to guard us even from stumbling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

We are not talking to you of things that we have dreamt. O sirs, we would not like to tell some of you how we have been tempted, how hard it has gone with us, how we have been saved by the skin of our teeth, but saved we have been, to the praise of God's mighty grace. Let His name be praised forever and ever. That is our witness. If you would be kept from temptation, come and trust Him, too.

We wish also to say that the Spirit of God coming from Christ moves men to high and noble thoughts. Selfishness no longer rules the man who believes in Christ—he loves his fellow men, he desires their good, he can forgive them if they persecute him, he can lay down his life for them. Have we not had many who have gone forth among the heathen and laid down their lives for Christ?

I was speaking with a brother from the Congo on Monday, and I spoke of the many deaths there, and he said, “Yes, it looks a sad thing that so many missionaries should die, but sir,” he added, “that is the first thing that we have done in Africa that is really hopeful. I have often heard the natives say to me, ‘These men must believe a true religion or else they would not come here to die for us poor black men.’ Men begin to believe this new kind of evidence. The blood of the missionary becomes the seed of the church.”

I do not doubt that it is so and beloved, if you and I can live wholly and alone for Christ, if we can live nobly, if we can get out of ourselves, if we can rise superior to worldly advantages, and prove that we believe all we say, we shall convince our fellow men of the truth of our religion. This is what the Holy Spirit would have us to be, and we desire to obey His promptings more and more.

*“Holy Spirit, dwell in me.
I, myself, would holy be.”*

I will not detain you many minutes more, but I must bear my testimony to the supporting power of Christ in the time of trouble. There are many here who would have been in the asylum, in their time of trial, if it had not been that they could carry their grief to Christ. There are some of us who are not strangers to very acute pain and to a long continuance of it, too—and we have found no comfort in the world like going to our Lord when racked with anguish and torn with pain. There is a power about Him to charm us into joy, when everything would drive us to distress, and almost to despair.

And specially, I want to bear my witness, not, of course, a personal one, but that of an observer, as to the power of our holy religion in the hour of death. I have been at many deathbeds. I have seen many Christians just about to die. There it is that the power of our holy religion comes in. How calm, how resigned—sometimes how triumphant, how ecstatic—is the frame of mind of the departing believer! I never heard one of them regret that he was a Christian.

In times when men sift what they have done and believed—and when they tell no lies, for the naked truth comes up before them—I have heard them glory in belonging to Christ and in resting in Him. But I have never heard them regret that they did so. Our religion is not all of the future—it is not a thing that dreams concerning the world to come. It gives us present joy, present strength, present comfort, and we commend it to you most heartily, for this is our duty, to be witnesses for Christ.

There are some who can give their evidence-in-chief, but the pity is that, when they come to be cross-examined, when they get among the ungodly in the world, they make a mess of it. The Lord have mercy upon some who come in among us, and even profess to know Christ and do not—it is their lie that taints the testimony of the true in the judgment of mankind!

Be you the more zealous to overbear their treachery by your consistency. Be you the more full of integrity, and stern truthfulness, and boundless love, to make up for these wounds which your Lord receives so often in the house of His friends.

May the Spirit of God rest upon you, beloved in the Lord, and may you hear your Master say to you, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me”! Amen.

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON

LUKE 4:16-30; 9:57-62 AND MATTHEW 28:16-20

We will read three short passages of Scripture, all relating to Christ’s service. The first concerns the ministry of the Lord Jesus Himself.

Luke 4:16-19. *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him*

the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

What a glorious passage! This was the text of Christ's whole ministry, not only of that day at Nazareth, but of all His life ever after.

20. *And he closed the book,—*

Rolled up the sacred writing,—

20. *And he gave it again to the minister, and sat down.*

Their practice was to sit down to speak, while the people usually stood to hear—a very good custom, indeed. If we did the same, perhaps we should have fewer of our hearers going to sleep.

20-21. *And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.*

That is the way to preach—bring home the Scripture to the present time, show its application to everyday life, especially point out its connection with Christ, and prove how it is fulfilled and verified in His sacred person. Doubtless, Jesus said a great deal besides what is here recorded, but there were no shorthand writers there to take down every word He uttered.

22. *And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?*

There! Did it matter whose son Jesus was? Yet, in order to abate the force and even the blessedness of divine truth, men turn their thoughts to the Speaker rather than to what He says. How foolish!

23. *And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.*

“Begin at home, work miracles here. You are the Son of the carpenter who lives here—now, do some wonderful work among us.”

24-26. *And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.*

Elijah did not feel bound to labor always among the Jews, but he went right to Sidon, to a heathen woman, and he sojourned with the widow in the faraway country. God is a Sovereign. He can save whom He wills and He will exercise that sovereignty and bless some of those who appear to be most hopeless, and to have the least signs of good about them, and to be the farthest removed from the means of grace.

27. *And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.*

Only the stranger and foreigner was cured of the disease of leprosy—another instance of divine sovereignty. Men do not like this doctrine of sovereignty. They are willing to have a god if he is not God—they do not mind believing in a god who is not King and who does not do as He wills with His own. They believe in free will, they say. Yes, yes, free will for everybody but God! Man is to be the god of man and of God, too, according to the talk of some.

But this is the thunder from the divine throne, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” Blessed is he who humbly bows his head and says, “Be it so, my Lord!” Absolute power cannot be in better hands than in those of the God of love.

28. *And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,—*

They were at first very pleased to have a promising young Preacher out of their own town and they said, one to another, “Did not He speak well?” Now they have changed their note—He has been too faithful for them. He has exalted God instead of man, and now they are filled with wrath.

29-30. *And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way,—*

With that holy calm in which He always dwelt, with wondrous self-possession, He passed through the midst of them and escaped their malice.

Now let us read what Christ says to those who would be His followers. Turn to—

Luke 9:57. *And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.*

He was a volunteer, but his zeal was too hot to hold out long. He had never fully known what following Christ meant, so he came forward without a thought.

58. *And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*

He did not reckon on such hard fare as that, to lie hard, and live hard, so we hear no more of him. That is would-be follower number one.

59. *And he said unto another, Follow me.*

Not a volunteer this time, but one actually called by Christ and commanded to come—a conscript, as it were.

59. *But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.*

We do not even know that his father was dead. He would like to stop at home till the old man was ready to be buried.

60. *Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.*

When Christ wants men to go upon His errands, they must make no excuses. The King's business requires haste. The King's commands are peremptory. Other people could bury the dead—let them do it. They were not alive unto this holy ministry—they would therefore be doing right in stopping to bury the dead. When Christ says to a man, "Follow me," he must not let even the most tender relationship detain him, or the most proper duties stand in the way of the highest duty. That is would-be follower number two. We hear no more of him.

61. *And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.*

"Lord, I will follow You, but I must have time. I want a little allowance and a permit to leave home. I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell, which are at home at my house." It might be a long distance and as it was now Christ's time to send out the seventy, they must go at once, or not at all. This man intends to wait till he has gone, perhaps, fifty miles home and back again.

62. *And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*

You must go at once when you have orders to go, and not even the courtesies of life, or the fondnesses of affection, may make you disobey the command of the Captain. It would be a pretty thing, in the day of battle, if the soldiers came to the general and one said, "I must go back to bury my father," and another said, "I cannot fight, for I want to go and bid farewell to my mother." The country would soon be in a desperate state for want of soldiers. And the great King, whose war is more important than any other, will not have for soldiers those who talk in this fashion. So, you see, there are three would-be followers gone, but there are at least seventy faithful followers left, as the next chapter shows.

Our third reading will be at the end of the Gospel according to Matthew.

Matthew 28:16. *Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.*

Away from the haunts of men, where He had been wont to be, in a country familiar to them, and with which He was familiar, in a despised country, “Galilee of the Gentiles.”

17. *And when they saw him, they worshipped him:*

Probably this was the occasion referred to by Paul, when the risen Savior “was seen of above five hundred brethren at once.”

17. *But some doubted.*

There were some honest doubters then. The breed has been kept up ever since, only there are more dishonest doubters by a great deal than there are of honest ones now. We can never expect to be quite free from doubters in the church, since even in the presence of the newly-risen Christ, “some doubted.”

18. *And Jesus came and spake unto them,—*

These words to imply that He came nearer to them than He was at first—unveiling Himself still more and revealing Himself more clearly.

18-19. *Saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,—*

“Teach,” that is, disciple, make disciples of “all nations.”

19-20. *Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:*

There is teaching again. It is as much the duty of the Christian to teach after baptism as to teach before baptism. He must be ever teaching. Hence believers are always to be learners, since Christ would have His servants always to be teachers, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” We are not to invent a Gospel. We are not to change, and shift, and cut, and shape it to meet the advancement of the age. Christ’s command is plain, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

20. *And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

They have their commission. Here is the seal to it. Here is the source of their power. Here is the society in which they are to work, “Lo, I am with you alway.” God grant that you and I, going forth to teach for Christ, may always have the sound of our Master’s feet with us, even to the end of the world! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—208, 663, 202

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